

McCabe United Methodist Church
The Courage to Act Right (Part 3 of 4)
Matthew 5:6 * Matthew 11:2-6: December 15, 2013
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Back in 1929, Chicago had a problem. The problem's name was Al Capone. Capone was a criminal. He was an evil man who ran the city of Chicago. Capone and his mob ran prostitution rings, extorted money from business owners and sold bootleg liquor worth millions of dollars. At the time, Capone owned most of Chicago's politicians and policemen, and those he couldn't buy, he threatened or had them killed.

During this same time, a young Treasury agent was assigned the Al Capone file. His job was to clean up Chicago which meant taking care of the Capone problem. Do you remember the name of this young twenty-six old Treasury Agent? Eliot Ness.

Ness and his team raided Capone's operations again and again and it cost Capone millions in lost revenue. As you can image, Capone wasn't happy with these raids.

Before Al Capone took out a contract on Eliot Ness's life, he decided to try a softer approach. He sent a messenger to Ness with an envelope. At the time, Ness was making \$2,800 a year and the envelope contained \$2000. The messenger made it clear that this could be a weekly salary for Ness . . . if he would just lay off Capone.

Eliot Ness put the money back in the envelope and sent it and the messenger back to Capone.

Then, he called a press conference. Ness told the media about Capone's attempted bribe.

The next day, the Chicago newspaper headlines read "*Ness and his men are UNTOUCHABLE.*"

And this began the legend of the untouchables.

My point is this: Eliot Ness and his G-men tried to do the right things. I'm sure they didn't always get it right, but they tried to do what was right and it took courage.

This is the third message in an Advent series about *Courage*. Two weeks ago, we talked about the *Courage to Believe*. The *Courage to Believe* in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. The *Courage to Believe* that Jesus lived and died for us and has plans for us.

Last week, we talked about the *Courage to Listen*. If we believe in Jesus. If we believe that Jesus is our Lord and Savior. If we believe that Jesus did live and die for us and has plans for us. Than, don't you think he might be worth listening to?

Today, we'll look at the *Courage to Act Right*. Or the *Courage to be Righteous*.

When I was in seminary, I had a professor who defined righteousness as *'right-living'* or *'acting right'*. I still think this is a pretty good definition. A righteousness person is a person who acts right or one who tries to live right.

The Bible is full of passages that talk about righteousness or right living. In Samuel 26:23, David said to Saul, **“The Lord rewards every person for their righteousness and faithfulness.”** In Psalms 89:14, we hear the Psalmist declare, **“Righteousness and justice are the foundation of God’s throne.”** In Romans 6:13, Paul writes, **“And offer every part of yourself to God as an instrument of righteousness.”** And in Matthew 5:6, we hear Jesus say, **“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”**

Righteousness or right-living is *'God’s way'*. In this world, there are many ways we can live our lives, some are better than others, but there’s only one *'God’s Way'* and it takes courage to follow *'God’s way'*.

The great American philosopher and wise man Yogi Berra once said, **“If you don’t know where you are going, you will wind up somewhere else.”**

Yogi was right. If we don’t choose how we live our lives . . . if we don’t choose *'God’s way'* then we’ll end up somewhere else.

In my own life, and maybe in your life, I sometimes hear two little voices and both voices are trying to get my attention. One of the voices sits on one shoulder and the second voice sits on the other shoulder. They each have a different message. The one voice encourages me to follow *'God’s way'* . . . to act right while the other voice doesn’t. And I have to choose which voice I listen to.

I think you might have the same two voices to choose from. Choosing the one voice, the one that calls us to follow *God’s way* takes courage.

Did you hear about the Moorhead, Minnesota woman, 19-year-old Erica Clark, who recently found an envelope full of \$100 bills in a McDonald’s parking lot in Moorhead? \$2,800 all together. She thought about how someone’s Christmas had just been ruined. In the paper she said, **“What if someone was going Christmas shopping and found their money was gone?”** The envelope had a deposit ticket inside with the name of a bank. She returned the money to the bank and they found the owner. She could have kept the money. She could have had a great Christmas herself, but she had the *Courage to Act Right*.

Acting right or living right is sometimes a matter of courage.

In February of this year, former U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Clinton Romesha was awarded the Medal of Honor for courageous service during an enemy attack in Afghanistan. Governor Jack Dalrymple paid Romesha this tribute: **“What Staff Sgt. Romesha accomplished while wounded and under heavy fire is remarkable. He disregarded his own safety to rescue injured soldiers, retrieve the fallen and take the fight to the enemy. He is a true American hero and we are proud to call him a North Dakotan.”**

Sgt. Romesha had courage. We’re not all called to be heroes like Sargent Romesha, but we are called to act right . . . to live right and that also takes courage.

What kind of courage do we have?

- We see an accident. Do we stop to help? Which voice do we follow?
- We’re talking to friends. They start making fun of someone who is unpopular. Do we join in?
- An older person needs a ride. Do we volunteer?
- A young person makes a wrong decision and gets into trouble. Do we condemn him or forgive him?
- We’re given a gift. Are we grateful?
- A teenager is offered some beer. Her friends all drink. What does she do?
- We earn some extra cash from a part-time job. Do we claim it on our income tax return or not?
- A family moves in next door to us. They don’t speak our language. Do we offer to help them or do we ignore them?
- An older driver makes a mistake driving his car. We see it. Do we get mad, lose our patience and swear at him? Or not?
- Two gay persons walk into church hand-in-hand. How do we treat them?
- We have an opportunity to share our faith with someone we know or don’t know. What do we do?

It takes *Courage to Act Right*. It takes courage to listen to the many competing voices in our lives and choosing the right one.

In our passage from Matthew, Jesus was asked, **“So Jesus, who are you anyway? Are you really the Messiah? Are you the one who will save us or not?”** They didn’t know.

Do you remember how Jesus answered? He said, **“look at what I’m doing. Let my life tell my story. The blind see, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.”**

“Who am I?” Jesus was saying. **“Look at my life and see for yourself.”**

Francis of Assisi put it this way, **“Preach the Gospel at all times and when necessary use words.”**

It takes *Courage to Act Right*. If someone were to follow you and me around for a day, how would they describe us? Could they tell whom we follow by the way we live and act?

Elie Wiesel, a Jewish author and a survivor of the Nazi Holocaust, tells a fictitious story about Adam, of Adam and Eve fame. When Adam first opened his eyes, he looked around the Garden of Eden and said to God, "**Wow! This is really great!**"

"**I know,**" God said.

Adam went on, "**but tell me, what's the meaning of it all? Why did you do it?**"

"**You mean,**" God said, "**life has to have a meaning?**"

"**Yes,**" Adam said. "**It does.**"

"**Well,**" God replied, "**I'm sure you'll think of something.**" And then God walked off.

Jesus put that something into words when he gave us this command, "**you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. And you shall love your neighbor as yourself.**"

This is a pretty good definition of acting right or right living. It's loving God and loving your neighbor as much as yourself. As we prepare ourselves for the coming of Christ this Advent, let us also prepare ourselves to live right or to act right. I do need to warn you, however, it will take courage.